



House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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Contact: Moira Whelan

(202) 226-8827

Homeland Security: We Are Not As Safe As We Need To Be

Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Democrat on the House Select Committee on Homeland Security released the following assessment of homeland security efforts thus far.

“Never has the gap between rhetoric and reality been more glaring,” said Turner. “Efforts on homeland security over the past three years have been tepid.”

While our country is safer today than it was on 9-11, we are not as safe as we need to be. Whether on land, sea, or air, critical security gaps continue to exist 3 years after the attacks of September 11. It is still easy for terrorists to cross our borders; our homeland security professionals lack vital information they need to protect us; and our nation’s first responders still lack the training and equipment they need to prepare for, or respond to, a terrorist attack.

Watch Lists and Information Sharing:

- The FBI’s Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) – designed to be the central repository for terrorist-related watch list information – is still not complete and linked electronically to all law enforcement agencies.
- The DHS’s Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) competes with at least 2 other federal networks that are designed to share homeland security information between federal, state and local officials.
- State and local officials still lack basic federal security clearances needed to do their jobs.

Border Security:

- Poor infrastructure, insufficient personnel levels, and underinvestment in technology have left the land borders porous and vulnerable to infiltration by terrorists;
- Lack of detention bed space has resulted in the release of over 24,000 illegal immigrants, from countries other than Mexico, into the United States.
- Border inspectors and patrols do not have access to a comprehensive integrated terrorist watch list; secondary inspectors must access eight separate databases to investigate an individual seeking entry to the United States.

- Radiation portal monitors to screen cargo trucks for weapons of mass destruction have not been deployed on the Southern Border.
- US VISIT applies to only about 12% of foreign visitors entering the U.S; it does not keep track of everyone who has left the United States; it is not interoperable with all key counterterrorism databases operated by the FBI and State Department; and it is not fully linked to the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) – designed to be the central repository for terrorist-related watch list information.

Aviation Security:

- No system exists to routinely screen 100% of the cargo that travels on passenger airliners.
- While more air marshals have been hired, hundreds more are needed to ensure security on passenger flights.
- No system has been deployed at every airport to screen airline passengers for explosives.
- The Transportation Security Administration (TSA)'s "no fly" and "automatic selectee" lists are not yet electronically linked to the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) – designed to be the central repository for terrorist-related watch list information.
- Passengers on most international flights bound for the U.S. are not checked against watch lists until after an aircraft is already in the air.

Port Security:

- Only a small percentage of cargo bound for the U.S. is inspected before being loaded on ships at foreign ports: the Department's Container Security Initiative (CSI) is not adequately staffed, and is not in place at all major ports abroad, including those in Pakistan and Indonesia.
- CSI inspectors are assigned overseas on a temporary basis without adequate training – they do not have time to gain the needed expertise before they are return to the United States.
- Radiation portal monitors that can screen for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are not deployed at all U.S. ports; no comprehensive screening system exists to screen cargo containers for the presence of WMD.
- The National Targeting Center selects "high risk" cargo to be inspected based, primarily, on manifest information – judged by security experts as "unreliable" for targeting high risk cargo.
- Based on Coast Guard estimates, port owners and operators are still short by over \$400 million to implement port security plan upgrades, such as surveillance cameras.
- "Smart" technologies have still not been widely implemented to improve container security.

Bioterrorism Preparedness:

- Our nation still lacks a comprehensive biodefense strategy to prepare our communities and hospitals for an attack. We do not know how we would respond to a bioterror event, or who

would be in charge at the local, state, and federal levels.

- The U.S. does not have the vaccines and medicines on hand to deal with the world's most deadly pathogens. Industry and bipartisan groups in Congress agree that Project Bioshield will not provide the private sector with the needed incentives to develop the necessary countermeasures.
- Efforts to secure U.S. pathogen research sites and collections have been inadequate; meanwhile, biological weapons sites in the former Soviet Union remain unsecured.
- Our Nation's public health and hospital preparedness remain weak. To date, only three states have achieved full readiness for distributing vaccines and antibiotics from the Strategic National Stockpile. According to a senior government official, "our public health system is (not) prepared for a significant bioterror event."
- The National Smallpox Vaccination Program – announced with great fanfare over a year ago - has failed. As a result, we cannot provide smallpox vaccine to the public fast enough to save lives. The number of emergency aid workers slated to be vaccinated has fallen well below the Administration's goal, and many States and localities report they are still unprepared to deal with a smallpox outbreak.

Chemical Plant Security:

- Across the nation, chemical facilities remain dangerously unsecured despite their clear vulnerability as terrorist targets.
- A 2002 study by the Brookings Institution concluded that an attack on a chemical facility ranked second only to a biological or nuclear attack in terms of possible fatalities.
- The U.S. is home to more than 66,000 chemical production and storage facilities spread out among our cities, towns, and rural areas. According to the EPA, 7,000 of these facilities pose a risk to 10,000 or more people. However, the Administration has not conducted a comprehensive assessment of chemical plant vulnerabilities, and Department of Homeland Security personnel have visited fewer than 100 facilities.
- The Administration's strategy has relied almost exclusively on voluntary industry efforts to improve chemical plant security. But – lacking economic incentives – owners and operators of chemical plants are not inclined to raise security. As a result, voluntary efforts are not practiced by the entire industry and thousands of chemical plants are without any obligation to make security improvements.
- Not a single hearing has been held in the House of Representatives on the Administration's chemical security proposal.

First Responder Funding:

- Our nation's firefighters, police, and paramedics – America's "first responders" – still lack the necessary equipment and training to enable them to respond to a terrorist attack.
- Homeland security grants are not distributed based on risk – Wyoming receives more federal

dollar per person than New York.

- From fiscal year 2002 through fiscal year 2005, the Administration has consistently requested lower levels of funding than the amounts enacted by Congress for federal grant programs that provide funds directly to states and/or localities for the purposes of building homeland security preparedness capabilities.
- Analysis by the International Association of Chiefs of Police shows that the Administration's proposed FY 2005 funding levels for DHS and Justice assistance programs for our first responders in law enforcement was \$3.3 billion, a reduction of \$1.6 billion or 32% from the combined FY 2004 level of \$4.9 billion. This represents the first decline in overall law enforcement assistance funding since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

First Responder Communications:

- Three years after 9/11, first responders nationwide still lack the ability to communicate with one another during a crisis.
- In its FY 2005 budget, the Administration zeroed out funding for interoperable communications grants. Previous estimates for upgrading communications systems nationwide have ranged as high as \$18 billion.
- Given high costs and lack of dedicated funding, first responders are now faced with choosing between purchasing interoperable communications equipment or funding other equally pressing needs like specialized equipment, training, and terrorism exercises.
- Recent Congressional testimony by one of the nation's leading providers of public safety communications systems makes the funding problem clear, "Our nation has the necessary technology, the standards, and equipment. What is lacking are the economic resources to acquire the equipment and deploy the systems, particularly at the state and local level."

Homeland Security Budget:

- The issue is not whether homeland security funding has increased – the issue is whether enough has been spent on homeland security since 9/11 to ensure we are as safe as we need to be.
- The President's FY 2005 budget request for homeland security contained multiple shortfalls:
 - Did not provide any new funding to improve the security of our rail and public transit systems, estimated to require at least \$2.8 billion;
 - Did not provide adequate resources to reach the \$1.1 billion total that the Coast Guard says is needed to protect our nation's ports. In fact, the President's budget cut funding for port security grants by 62 percent compared with the current year level;
 - Did not provide the \$247 million needed to ensure that radiation portal monitors – which can be used to detect the presence of a weapons of mass destruction entering our country – are installed at all of our seaports and border crossings by next year;
 - Did not provide any new funding to increase the security of the cargo that travels on passenger jets;

- Did not provide the resources needed to allow airports across the country to upgrade or install explosive detection systems. This need, alone, could be as high as \$3 billion over the next several years;
- Did not provide the \$100 million needed to hire additional security personnel along our Northern Border, consistent with the Patriot Act.; and
- Did not provide needed resources for our nation's first responders. In particular, the President's budget:
 - Reduced the State Homeland Security Grant program by \$1 billion – or 59 percent – relative to the current year level. This is done at a time when emergency personnel all across America still lack the equipment, training, and personnel needed to respond to acts of terrorism;
 - Cut the FIRE grant program by 33 percent compared with the current year level; and
 - Zeroed out funding for interoperable communications grants that are used to provide the equipment our police, fire fighters, and other emergency response personnel need to ensure they can talk to one another in the event of a crisis.